

Ex. 4. Ten Concert Studies for Piano (1957), first Etude, bars 1-10.

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ

Allegro non troppo ♩ = 104

f legato

2/4

6

mp — *cresc.*

In the last phase of her compositional output, i.e., from 1960, the angularity and at times forcefulness of her rhythmic patterns is replaced by a greater rhythmic fluidity. Although the general nature of the rhythmic material remains the same, the patterns are shorter, more varied, more asymmetrical and a-metric.

Ex. 5. In Una Parte (1967), bars 7-11.

[illegible]

1.3 Melody

Her melodic material is a synthesis of Polish folk melodic characteristics and the scalar and arpeggio figures of Baroque string writing. Folk characteristics are manifested in the use of ostinati, pedal points, static pitch centres and a predilection for smaller intervals. Scalar and arpeggio figures are largely constructed of the intervals of the second or the third and variations of the chromatic scale are used frequently as principal or secondary thematic material.

Although her melodic material is distinct and individual, it is limited in range and scope. Furthermore, motivic developmental processes are replaced by an ongoing timbral variation of material.

In her later compositions this lack of melodic focus is made even more distinct by the transformation of background material into foreground melodic material, often as vehicles for instrumental virtuosity. In the String Quartet no. 7 (1965), melodic material consists almost exclusively of ostinati, dense static clusters, chromatic scales and pedal points, punctuated by glissandi, pizzicato and percussive chords.

"Bacewicz's tendency is to understate and control her lyricism, which heightens for the listener a sense of the music's restrained power. That similar features may be discovered consistently throughout her musical output suggests both her strengths (in creating and maintaining a definite personal style honed and perfected through remarkable technical gifts) and her limitations. The latter include a certain conservatism, a wariness of risk-taking and experimentation and a refinement of intellectual clarity and conviction at, perhaps, the expense of imagination." ¹⁹

¹⁹ Zaimont, J.L. The Musical Woman. An International Perspective. 1983. Greenwood Press. 1984. p. 120.

1.4 Harmony

The composer's harmonic style is characterised by a fully chromatic syntax. In the greater part of her compositional output this chromaticism is grounded by pitch centres in the form of pedal points and ostinati. In these works she maintains an interplay between these two aspects of her style to create areas of greater or lesser harmonic tension in her music. In this way phrases are articulated and sectional contrast is underlined.

Her works after 1960 are characterised by a more succinct and concentrated style, coupled with a greater emphasis on dissonant, linear counterpoint. All twelve tones of the chromatic scale are used to create melodic material, with far less interplay between consonance and dissonance. In Pensieri Notturni pitch centres are still used in isolated sections to underline contrast and even articulate sound events. However, these articulatory functions are used progressively less in her later works. In these works ostinati, pedal points and repetitive-note figures are featured in layered textures of accumulated tones. Sound events are articulated through textural contrast and through glissandi and single chords between contrapuntal lines.

1.5 Texture

The general contrapuntal nature of her music is characteristic of most neo-classical works. The music of Bohuslav Martinu and Paul Hindemith for instance, share similar polyphonic, contrapuntal textures.

However, her music is individual in its presentation of similar and contrasting thematic material, superimposed and juxtaposed in multi-layered textures. Her music shows a steady progression from the polyphonic practices of Baroque and Classical forms in the works of her first three periods, to a more individual

contrapuntal style in her later works. These last works are characterised by a lucid texture and a more consistent contrapuntal design.

The works of her earlier three periods are characterised by juxtapositions between chordal and contrapuntal textures. In her later works, there is a more integrated textural design, with an emphasis on timbral sonorities and the interplay between various instrumental groups. Textural contrast in these works therefore has a timbral function. Layered ostinati and layered pedal points, free scalar and arpeggio passages and chordal clusters are scored for contrasting string, woodwind groups and single percussion instruments. This material is constantly superimposed and juxtaposed in a free and more consistent polyphonic interplay of material. (See examples 1 and 5 pages 111 and 118).

1.6 Form

The formal design of her music before 1960 is characterised by classical forms, in particular sonata form and sonata-rondo form. However, her application of these forms is individual. She fully exploits the use of pairs of contrasting themes to effect an interplay of material, underlined by timbral contrast. These contrasting themes also articulate the sectional, periodic and phrase structure of her music. However, the traditional development section of sonata form is replaced rather by an ongoing rhythmic transformation of material. Although recapitulation sections can contain exact restatement of material, these final sections often contain new and derived material. Her formal design is thus characterised by a constantly varying syntax in which derived and new material is presented simultaneously.

In the music after 1960, thematic dialogue is replaced by a collage of multiple melodic and rhythmic patterns cast in contrasting instrumental sonorities. A process of rhythmic transformation of material is replaced by a continuous timbral variation of material. Sectional contrast is nevertheless clearly defined by

juxtaposition of material and underlined by metric changes found in her earlier works. The accent on timbral definition and timbral contrast of material in her later works creates the formation of clearly-defined sound events. These are articulated in various ways, depending on the nature of the melodic and rhythmic material within sound events. Secondary articulating features always underline these structural units. These occur as glissandi, rests and single percussive chords between sound events. Fluctuations in tempi in some sections further underline sound events.

Conclusion

She maintains a highly distinctive and individual style throughout her compositional output. Her stylistic vernacular remains largely stable throughout the first three periods of her compositional career. She nevertheless always regarded herself as a progressive composer in the sense that she felt she could always improve on her previous compositions.

In many respects she was a victim of circumstance. The social and political climate in Poland was not conducive to experimentation. She nevertheless moulded and refined her craft to produce a highly individual style. The political climate changed quite dramatically at a later stage in her career. Nevertheless in these last compositions, her style is more refined, distilled and crystallised. It is a great tragedy that she could not continue along this new path in this later stage of her career.

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